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**THE EMOTIVE THEORY OF VALUE IN
AYER'S LOGICAL POSITIVISM**

by

John D. O'Neill, S.J.

**A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School
of Loyola University in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts**

July

1956

LIFE

John O'Neill, S.J., was born in Detroit, Michigan, July 9, 1929.

He attended St. Mary of Redford grade school graduating in June, 1943. He entered University of Detroit High School the following September and was graduated in June, 1947. The month following graduation he entered the Jesuit Novitiate at Milford, Ohio, and was enrolled in the College of Arts of Xavier University, Cincinnati, Ohio. In August, 1951 he was transferred to West Baden College, West Baden Springs, Indiana, an affiliate of Loyola University, Chicago, Illinois, from which school he received the degree of Bachelor of Arts in June, 1952. He then entered the Graduate School of Loyola University to pursue his studies for the degree of Master of Arts.

At present he is teaching Mathematics at St. Ignatius High School, Cleveland, Ohio.

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CHAPTER I

HISTORY OF LOGICAL POSITIVISM

"The philosophers with whom I am in the closest agreement are those who compose the Viennese circle, under the leadership of Moritz Schlick, and are commonly known as logical positivists."¹ Thus Alfred J. Ayer writes in the introduction to his book, Language, Truth, and Logic. This book has become known as the classic work on Logical Positivism, and in it he first expounds his emotive theory of value, the topic of this thesis. Because this theory flows from his Logical Positivism, we will want to discuss this philosophy. We will first treat of the history of the movement which, as Ayer says, is largely a history of the Vienna Circle. Then we will give an exposition of Ayer's positivism, proceed to his value theory, and conclude our thesis with a fourth chapter criticising his doctrine, both his positivism and his value theory.

Logical Positivism is largely a history of the Vienna Circle. This Circle evolved in 1923 out of a seminar led by Professor Moritz Schlick, and attended, among other students, by

1. Alfred J. Ayer, Language, Truth, and Logic, 2nd ed., London, 1953. This book shall be referred to, in future, as L., T., and L.

F. Waisman and H. Feigl. Professor Schlick then held the chair of inductive sciences at the University of Vienna. A scientist by training he had turned to philosophy and become interested in discovering the foundations of all science, philosophical and natural alike. He had written his doctoral dissertation, under Planck, on a problem in theoretical optics and was in constant contact with the foremost scientists of the day, Planck, Einstein, Hilbert. At the same time, he was interested in empirical philosophy: Comte, Mill, Hume, Russell, etc. His seminar strove to clarify the foundations of all knowledge and attracted both scientists and philosophers to it. Among its early members were Otto Neurath, sociologist; Zilsel, Juhos, and Neider, doctors of philosophy; Victor Kraft, historian; Felix Kaufmann, lawyer; Hans Hahn, mathematician. The brilliant Finnish psychologist and philosopher E. Kaula was also an active member of the Thursday evening discussions at Vienna. As can be seen, the Circle was well represented in the various fields of knowledge.

It may be wondered what common bond held these men, of variant walks of life, together. Victor Kraft tells us in his Work, The Vienna Circle:

There was one common tenet: that philosophy ought to be scientific....The rigorous requirements of scientific thinking were postulated for philosophy. Unambiguous clarity, logical rigor and cogent argument are as indispensable to philosophy as to the other sciences. There is no place in philosophy for dogmatic assertions and untestable speculations, such as still nowadays abound

in philosophy. Opposition to all dogmatic-speculative metaphysics was implicit in these postulates. Metaphysics was to be completely eliminated, and thus the Vienna Circle was tied to positivism.²

This common agreement did not just come about by chance. As early as 1895 Ernst Mach had held the chair of inductive sciences at Vienna and it was from him that the empirical philosophy at Vienna received its original impetus. His successors, Boltzmann, Stechr, Gomperz, and Jodl passed on the tradition to Schlick who put it into operation. According to Mach all knowledge and experience can be reduced to various elements which are experiential. All statements are complex organizations of elemental experiences. In his monistic view of reality metaphysics is mere fiction.

A priori and eternal truths do not exist, nor is there any difference in principle between axioms and deduced sentences. All statements concerning the world, particular as well as general rules, natural laws, theories, and principles, are subject to continuous control and modifications... On a closer examination, things, too, appear to be merely relatively constant complexes of so-called qualities which Mach identified with our sensations and called elements. A "thing-in-itself" existing behind these elements is a metaphysical illusion, presumably due to the fact that the same names are used to designate things, even though these change, so that we are led to believe that the same thing persists throughout the changes. What we do observe is actually never any such hidden things but simply qualities of their mutual relations... Physical and psychical phenomena are not essentially different, and all statements concerning them are of exactly equal rank, since they can

² Victor Kraft, The Vienna Circle, trans. Arthur Pap, N. Y., 1953, 15.

all be reduced to statements about complexes of sensations which are all that is given or immediately observable.

Schlick and his followers adopted Mach's empirical view of reality and decided to build their universal science about it. By the application of logical analysis, which is a distinctive feature of the new empiricism and positivism, a hitherto unattained completeness of precision is obtained. Since natural science had made so much progress, they adopted its tools, mathematics and verification. They also studied the logic of mathematics, for they wished to formulate a language which would apply to all sciences. This language would have elemental words (designating experience) as its terms and mathematics would be the mode of composition and deduction.

As time went on more and more distinguished men joined the Circle. Petzsch came from Scandinavia. Also, C. G. Hempel from Berlin; A. E. Blumberg from Baltimore, and last but not least, A. J. Ayer from Oxford. Although Alfred Ayer joined the Circle at a late date and did not contribute greatly toward the formulation of the basic tenets of Logical Positivism, he did take part in a number of the evening sessions. He assimilated the convictions of those with whom he dealt and although yet in his early twenties expressed in his small book, Language, Truth,

3 Joergen Joergensen, The Development of Logical Empiricism, contained in International Encyclopedia of Unified Science, Vol. II, number 2, Chicago, 1931, 7-10.

and Logic, the most succinct and typical exposition of Logical Positivism existent. Also affiliated with the group were K. Menger, H. Kelsen, K. Popper, and H. Gomperz. The group grew in enthusiasm as it grew in size. In spite of their varied backgrounds, the members found that using the method and tools of the special sciences they were making rapid progress in the clarification of ideas, their end in view.

The discussions of the Circle centered about the foundations of logic and mathematics, the logic of empirical knowledge, and only occasional excursions into the philosophy of the social sciences and ethics. Despite the many differences of opinion, there was a remarkable spirit of friendly cooperation in the Circle. The procedure was definitely that of a joint search for clarity.

In 1926 Rudolph Carnap was called to the University and it meant a great stimulant to the cause of Positivism. For his ideas together with the ideas of Ludwig Wittgenstein⁵ form the basis of most of modern-day Logical Positivism. His constitution theory is a very neat and precise enunciation of the fundamental doctrine of the school. It is the theory that any tenable concept of real objects is constituted by being reduced to characteristics of that which is immediately given, and any meaningful statement is constituted by being reduced to a

4 Herbert Feigl, "Logical Empiricism," Twentieth Century Philosophy, ed. D. D. Runes, N. Y., 1947, 408-409.

5 Wittgenstein did not attend the Circle, but contributed his book, Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus, London, 1922.

statement of the given. This theory created a framework in which the

Vienna Circle could work; its negative task is an expurgation of metaphysical-speculative statements as meaningless, while its positive task is to define even more precisely and fully the meaning of scientifically tenable statements.

To constitute an object means to reduce it to other objects, i.e., to formulate a general rule indicating the way in which a statement containing the name of the first object may be replaced by an equivalent statement not containing it. What Russell and Whitehead did in Principia Mathematica with regard to mathematics,⁷ Carnap in his theory of constitution attempts to do with regard to the natural and social sciences, although, as far as the greater part is concerned, only in outline form and with a limited application of symbolic logic.

In opposition to this constitution theory, whereby all knowledge is founded on immediately given experiences which are subjectless, stands Otto Neurath. He maintained that propositions were checked only by other propositions. Carnap's theory, he believed, might lead to a return to metaphysical absolutism, for the connection between the experiences and the sentences that describe them, he claimed, were metaphysical. Not even direct

6 Jørgensen, The Development of Logical Empiricism, 4.

7 Whitehead and Russell in this work reduce all mathematical concepts to the logical-fundamental concepts.

statements of observation can be compared with the objects concerned but merely with other statements of observation or with statements of other kinds, and their truth does not depend on their agreement with the objects observed but solely on their agreement with the totality of all statements accepted at a given time. As a result, Neurath proceeded to look to the formal syntactic characteristics of direct statements of observation. These statements he called, following Carnap's suggestion, protocol-sentences. Such statements, he held, could be used to verify and test scientific hypotheses. Schlick himself was opposed to admitting protocol sentences as a basis for the attainment of knowledge and a means for testing all other sentences. Such a criterion, he posed, would not distinguish reality from fairy-tale. Neurath countered that a consistent theory is used only to explain reality, and outlandish fairy tales would not fit in consistently with such a logical system of sentences. By continual practical application one can distinguish fairy-tales from logical theories about reality which are suitable for predictions about the future. He admitted protocol-sentences would not give absolute certitude, but what theory would! Carnap finally settled the debate by effecting a compromise. He stated that a sentence will have meaning if it is consistent with other sentences in a logical system or either testable or confirmable. Thus both logical and factual sentences may be admitted as meaningful, but

not metaphysical sentences which purport to be factual yet are in no way confirmable. This theory of meaning has been adopted by all modern logical positivists. As we shall see in Chapter II, it is one of the fundamental doctrines of Ayer's positivism.

Wittgenstein, preoccupied with architecture, was not able to take an active part in the discussions, but his ideas were hotly discussed by the others, and his contributions to axiomatics and his theory of the constitution of empirical concepts aided Carnap and the others in evolving their doctrine. His theory of atomic and molecular sentences helped them explain the interconnection of sentences and to show how a complete science can be broken down into basic verifiable elements. The laws of deduction, for example, are nothing else but the laws for the combination of basic or protocol sentences. Wittgenstein also showed that mathematics cannot be extended to reality qua tale, but remains on a plane above. It may be applied to reality but it is not real in itself. It is a priori, tautological, to employ the term used by the school.

In 1929 Schlick had gone to Stanford University as a visiting professor. During his absence the others became connected with the Berlin Group. F. Kraus, H. Reichenbach, A. Herzberg, R. von Mises and others had there formed a similar society for empirical philosophy. The purpose of the Berlin Group was to promote scientific philosophy, by which was under-

stood "...a philosophical method which advances by analysis and criticism of the results of the special sciences to the stating of philosophical questions and their solutions."⁸ It is evident how closely their work was associated with the Vienna group, and the two groups interchanged many valuable ideas. At the same time the Circle published its aims in a pamphlet Wissenschaftliche Weltauffassung: Der Wiener Kreis, Vienna, 1929.

The aim is to form an Einheitswissenschaft, i.e., a unified science comprising all knowledge of reality accessible to man without dividing it into separate, unconnected special disciplines, such as physics and psychology, natural science and letters, philosophy and the special sciences. The way to attain this is by the use of the logical method of analysis, worked out by Peano, Frege, Whitehead, and Russell, which serves to eliminate metaphysical problems and assertions as meaningless as well as to clarify the meaning of concepts and sentences of empirical science by showing their immediately observable content—das Gegebene.

This pamphlet was presented to Schlick on his return to Vienna in 1930. At this time Schlick read a paper at Oxford on "The Future of Philosophy," in which he describes the new method of philosophy. The new view of philosophy followed Wittgenstein. It asserted that 1) philosophy is not a science and 2) it is the mental activity of clarification of ideas. We must first clarify the meaning of our propositions before we can look to their truth or falsity. It is the duty of the special sciences to investi-

⁸ Joergensen, The Development of Logical Empiricism, 49.

⁹ Ibid., 4.

gate truth, not philosophy. Metaphysical propositions are meaningless combinations of words. The philosopher is one who analyzes the ultimate meaning of scientific theories; the scientist is one who tests the truth or falsity of these theories. "The result of philosophizing will be that no more books will be written about philosophy, but that all books will be written in a philosophical manner."¹⁰

The Circle was also connected with members of the Polish group of logicians and philosophers, principally Tarski, who is now at Harvard. Also members were Bohr, Denmark; Ness, Norway; Mannoury, Holland.

Soon, however, the members began to branch out. In 1930 Feigl went to the United States. Wittgenstein was called to Cambridge, where he succeeded G. E. Moore. Carnap was called to Prague, where together with Philip Frank, professor of physics, he formed a separate branch of the Vienna Circle. Hahn died in 1934. The Circle suffered its severest blow in 1936 when Schlick was murdered by an insane student. This same year Carnap went to the University of Chicago; Waismann and Neurath went to England, where Neurath died in 1946.

In spite of these departures the various groups and members maintained their unity through various congresses held

each year. The first two were held at Prague and Königsberg in 1929, and 1930. The first international congress was held at Prague in 1934. Otto Neurath was the principal organizer and motivator of these congresses. The next meeting was at Paris, 1935. It was at this meeting that Neurath proposed the International Encyclopedia of Unified Science, an organization still functioning out of Chicago. Successive congresses were held until the war put a stop to unified activity in Europe.

The war found many Logical Positivists already in America where they are still working. Zilsel and Kaufmann went to the United States with the advent of war. Zilsel died in 1943. Morris and Carnap are now working out of Chicago. Feigl is in Minnesota, von Mises at Harvard, Bergmann at Iowa, Hempel at Yale; Wright is still at Cambridge, while Popper and Miss Stebbing are in London.

Neurath, Carnap, Morris and the others continue to integrate their ideas through their publication out of Chicago, The International Encyclopedia of Unified Science. Neurath was the first editor-in-chief of this publication. Unity of science, it will be remembered, is the objective of the Logical Positivists. They want to form a science comprising all human knowledge. It will consist of an epistemologically homogeneous ordered mass of sentences which are of the same empirical

nature from protocol-sentences to the most comprehensive laws which are used to explain the phenomena of nature. It is, "...a monism free from metaphysics."¹¹ It aims at formulating a universal physical language, which will comprise the contents of all scientific languages. It is the purpose of philosophy, they say, to analyze this language and reduce it to its protocol-sentences which are experiential. Such a language will be intelligible to all, apply to all areas of knowledge, and be testable by means of the senses. It will be the universal tool of thought and investigation.

The unification of science, then, is the driving force, the purpose, the end in view of Logical Positivists. It was this purpose which attracted such competent men from varied fields of science and philosophy. It was this motive which guided them in the development and organization of their ideas into a precise philosophy. In this chapter we have followed the founders of the movement as they developed their ideas. This development was, by necessity, gradual and fluid. Let us now proceed to a more static systematized study of the doctrine of Logical Positivism. The doctrine is found in its most lucid and typical form in the writings of A. J. Ayer.

11 Ibid., 76.

CHAPTER II

BASIC TENETS OF AYER'S POSITIVISM

The views which are put forward in this treatise derive from the doctrines of Bertrand Russell and Wittgenstein, which are themselves the logical outcome of the empiricism of Berkeley and David Hume,¹

Thus Ayer begins the preface to the first edition of his classic work, Language, Truth, and Logic. He declares that he is an empiricist, that he admits no reality beyond the sense level, nothing which cannot be tested or measured scientifically. He does admit the certitude of mathematical and logical propositions but denies that such propositions can be classified as true or false, that they say anything about the world about us. Propositions about matters of fact, however, can be true if verified. That is, they will probably be true but one can never be certain. He is consistent in his empiricism, in that he holds that one can never attain certitude as regards the world about us. To test the validity of an empirical sentence he employs the traditional verification principle of positivism. For such a proposition to make sense, it must be at least theoretically verifiable; one should be able to determine its truth or false-

1 Ayer, L., T., and L., 31.

hood by scientific, experiential methods. Otherwise it is literally senseless.

In his book The Foundations of Empirical Knowledge, Ayer continues to maintain his empiricism. He also gives it a phenomenalist tinge. Beyond sense phenomena there is nothing. Like Locke he denies the distinction between substance and accident, identifying reality with sense-data.

A common way of expressing this conclusion is to say that material things are nothing but collections of actual and possible sense-data....What is being claimed is simply that the propositions which are ordinarily expressed by sentences which refer to material things could also be expressed by sentences which referred exclusively to sense-data;...

A natural consequence of his empiricism was to deny causality as Hume did.

It was recognized by Hume that "when we look about us towards external objects, and consider the operations of causes, we are never able, in a single instance, to discover any power or necessary connexion; any quality which binds the effect to the cause, and renders the one an infallible consequence of the other."²

He rejected all necessary connections between cause and effect and held that we simply associate them causally because we are used to seeing one follow the other. But there is no certitude

² Alfred J. Ayer, The Foundations of Empirical Knowledge, London, 1951, 231-232.

³ Ibid., 183-184. Hume's statement taken from An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding, Part I, section vii.

that determined effects will follow given causes. Ayer continues to maintain the traditional doctrine of the British Empiricists even to this day. Empiricism is the background pervading his latest book, published just two years ago.

If we have settled our usage of the term 'exist' in such a way that nothing which is not capable of being experienced can properly be said to exist, then our ground for making the statement that nothing exists except what can be experienced will be that it is necessarily true.

Ayer's whole thought is Humean; nothing exists beyond sense phenomena, unless, as we shall later show, it be language.

With these empirical premises one is never able to get to any transcending realities. Knowledge must begin and stop on the sense level. The truth of any statement can be determined only by comparing the statement with experience; testing it scientifically. Kant had held that the mind had no knowledge of realities and things beyond experience. Ayer continues further and says that statements about anything transcending the sensible are meaningless. A sentence or proposition is true, or rather significant factually only if it can be verified; that is, if observation can disclose it to be true or false. Approaching the subject from a scientific viewpoint, Ayer does not want to rule out general scientific hypotheses. Hence he does not re-

4 Alfred J. Ayer, Philosophical Essays, London, 1954, 226.

quire conclusive verification as a proof of factual significance. If a statement can be verified in most instances it is a reasonable guarantee of the truth of the general statement. Truth here, of course, must be taken in a restricted sense. To Ayer it means a high degree of probability, a likelihood that such a statement can be verified again in the future. It is a practical certitude worth relying on. It is not an absolute certitude.

If a proposition can be definitely correlated with experience, can be observed sensibly, the operation of correlation is called practical verifiability. If, however, one cannot observe or test the veracity of a proposition but can, at least, conceive of a method of testing the truth or falsehood of a proposition, the operation is called verifiability in principle. To use a favorite example of positivists, we can directly observe that the side of the moon facing us is blue. Such a statement is verifiable in practice. However, to say that the opposite side is also blue is a statement which is verifiable only in principle. We cannot observe this fact, but we can conceive of a scientific method of finding out whether the fact is true or not. We could fly a rocket ship to said location and investigate. Notice, we are not here saying whether such a statement is true or false. We simply show that, in principle, one could find out. Such a statement, whether true or false, is not factually meaningless.

Verifiability is also classified as either strong or weak; strong if conclusive, weak if only probable. Ayer originally held that no propositions could be conclusively verified. In the introduction to the latest edition of Language, Truth, and Logic, he held some could be conclusively verified. "If I do not now draw this conclusion, it is because I have come to think that there is a class of empirical propositions of which it is permissible to say that they can be verified conclusively."⁵ Such a proposition, he goes on to say, would be a basic proposition; it would describe a single experience. In his latest work, however, he denies strong verifiability completely, for he denies that any proposition ever describes a single experience. The terms of every proposition were drawn from previous experiences and every sentence is a comparison of subject and predicate, a comparison we can never be sure of. This is not to deny the certitude of sensation, though. We can know pain without being able to describe it, that is all. We experience many things but can never be sure we are using our words properly to describe them. Ayer would then conclude that verification can be stronger or weaker but never completely strong, never absolutely certain. Thus Ayer will speak of sets of empirical propositions and allow that they are verified if but a part of them are verifiable.

5 Ayer, L., T., and L., 10.

My conclusion is, then, that we can have no reason to believe in the truth of any set of empirical propositions unless at least one of them can be directly verified; and that, for a proposition to be directly verifiable, it is necessary that the meaning of the sentence which expresses it should be determined by correlation with some observable state of affairs, though this correlation need not be univocal.⁶

In this discussion of verification, it will be noted that reference has been made to "meaning." A thing can be neither true nor false unless it first have meaning. The words of the sentence must first make sense, and then the connections between these words must have meaning. If the sentence is empirical, its meaning must be tested by verification with observable data. Meaning then is a broader term than verification. It means for Ayer either correlation of symbols with symbols or of symbols with facts. A thing is factually significant, as we have said, if it can be verified at least theoretically. But regardless of this fact it can still have meaning on the condition that the words or symbols employed in the sentence designate individually some observable reality or aspect of reality, and the words are organized or joined according to some intelligible plan.

If the statement is meaningful, it is called a

6 Ayer, Foundations, 111.

proposition.⁷ The word statement by itself refers to any indicative sentence, be it meaningful or not. A sentence in turn is a grammatically significant form of words. Proposition then refers to meaning, sentence and statement to the form or language expressing the proposition. The word meaning, however, Ayer does not try to define. It is a factual term, and Ayer, being an empiricist, cannot admit of general or universal definitions on the factual level. Meaning can only be determined in particular cases, particular contexts, by comparing with experience.

There is no one thing that all symbols mean. Accordingly, if one is asked what is the meaning of a sentence or a word, one must counter with the questions: What sentence? What word? Then, if instances are given, one may be able to explain what they mean.

Sentence, symbol, proposition, etc. are purely on the logical plane and can be defined arbitrarily. Meaning, however, pertains to reality and is not purely logical. Therefore, its definition, like other empirical terms, will vary with the objects referred to. When the word meaning is restricted to its logical significance, then it will of course be defined without any reference

⁷ These definitions can be found in Ayer, L., T., and L., 8. In defining these terms we are following Ayer's lead. He is primarily concerned with logic and definition, in keeping with his concept of the purpose of philosophy.

⁸ Ayer, Foundations, 98.

to reality. Logical terms have significance only on the logical plane.

Nor need it give rise to any philosophical perplexity so long as we remember in using it that "meaning," "knowing," "believing" and the rest are not relations like "loving" or "killing," that require a real object, and that to say that people know, or believe, or doubt propositions or that a proposition is what a sentence means, is, at best, to explain the use of the word "proposition," and is not to make a statement of fact.

The exact meaning of propositions Ayer leaves to the sociologists. For only they can decide what realities correspond to the various propositions or ideas people have. Equivalent sentences may not have the same meaning. To have the same meaning signifies that such sentences both produce the same effects on one's thoughts and actions. Whether two different sentences produce the same effect on thought and action is a matter of fact and subject to sociological investigation. The study of human actions and attitudes lies in that field. The sociologist will tell what various words and sentences signify to people. The philosopher steers clear of such factual questions. He remains on the logical plane. He tells us the purpose of words, and sentences in general, and investigates the relationship of subject and predicate in sentences. He may tell us what the verb or predicate says of the subject of the sentence but he will not tell us

whether or not the subject exists in the real order of things or not. Matters of fact are outside his scope.

Philosophy then is a logical rather than a factual analysis. Its purpose is to investigate logical rather than factual meaning. This does not mean that it thereby provides speculative or theoretical truths. Truth lies only on the factual plane. Philosophy can only clarify propositions of science by exhibiting their logical relationships and by defining the symbols which occur in them. Nor does philosophy construct a deductive system based on certain first principles. Such so-called principles are not experiential laws. For example, Descartes deduced his science from the principle, Cogito, ergo sum. But such a principle is fallacious. Cogito merely says "that a thought exists," not that any other thought "I" exists. No amount of experience can ever prove such a conclusion. As Hume showed, the Ego is merely a bundle of distinct events. Nor can one derive his science from a priori truths for such statements are tautological, i. e., non-factual.

Nor is it the job of philosophy to try to solve the assumed problem of induction: to prove that empirical generalizations derived from the past will hold true in the future. This principle cannot be proved from any logical principle. Logical or tautological principles, as we have said before, tell

us nothing about reality, and cannot substantiate any natural principle. Nor can it be proved from any empirical principle. Such a principle would either state or presuppose the law of induction itself. The principle of the uniformity of nature, for example, is simply a restatement of the principle of induction. The principle of limited independent variety, another principle used by all scientists, presupposes and depends on the principle of induction. The problem of induction then cannot be solved; rather, it is not problem. It is a fiction of the mind.

Such a principle can, however, be used legitimately by scientists. The only requirements of a scientific procedure is self-consistency, and success in practice. If it satisfies all the necessary conditions of self-consistency, contains no intrinsic contradictions, and works consistently in practice, it is a legitimate and useful method. It works, therefore, we can use it. In using tried and true methods to determine new scientific results, we are not being irrational in expecting the future to conform to the past. We are not asserting or establishing any necessary causality between our laws and natural occurrences. It has been our experience that the future usually does conform to the past, and if we notice a regular occurrence of happenings, and formulate such occurrences in the form of a scientific law, we can logically use these laws as guides to the

future. Rationality itself entails being guided in a particular fashion by past experience. In the practical order of things it is the only way to operate. Scientific laws are no different than any other common sense maxims.

The function of philosophy is wholly critical: to test the validity of our scientific hypotheses and everyday assumptions. It shows the criteria which one uses to determine the truth or falsehood of any given proposition. It is necessary for philosophy to give a correct definition of material things in terms of sensations, but it does not thereby validate our sensible perceptions. Sensations, after all, are fundamental and everything else must be interpreted in connection with them. It is not the purpose of philosophy to establish a justification of empirical truths. Such things are self-evident. It only tries to clarify and analyze the concepts by which we describe such phenomena.

How does philosophy undertake this logical analysis? By giving definitions. It provides not dictionary definitions but definitions in use. Explicit or dictionary definitions are mere synonyms. One substitutes equivalent words for the words given to be defined. Definitions in use, on the other hand, are equivalent sentences which contain neither the thing to be defined (the definiendum) nor synonyms. They are logical trans-

formations, which convey the same idea by means of entirely different words. Their purpose is to aid understanding. One may understand a sentence as a whole and not understand a definite word or phrase in it. By definition the meaning becomes clear. In this idea Ayer follows the lead of Bertrand Russell who first explained it under the title, "the theory of definite descriptions."¹⁰ Such philosophic definitions dispel the confusions which arise from our imperfect understanding of certain types of sentences in our language where the need cannot be met by the use of a synonym. The purpose of philosophy, after all, is clarification of ideas or words. A complete philosophic elucidation of a language will enumerate the various types of significant sentences, then display the relations of equivalence that hold between sentences of different types. Two sentences will be of the same type when they can be correlated in such a way that to each symbol in one sentence there corresponds a symbol of the same type in the other; and two symbols are of the same type when it is always possible to substitute one for the other without changing a significant sentence into a piece of nonsense. Two sign elements are of the same symbol if they have the same form and the same usage. For example, x and x . A sym-

¹⁰ Bertrand Russell, Principia Mathematica, Cambridge, 1950, Introduction and Chapter III.

bol is a logical construction, for example, house or book.

In seeking definitions, philosophy always looks to sensation. It strives to reduce, by definitions in use, complicated sentences into more basic protocol sentences whose symbols more directly describe reality. If a sentence cannot be translated into protocol sentences, either directly or indirectly, the sentences will be meaningless. Admittedly, it is difficult to try to describe objective material things with subjective symbols. Therefore, in trying to discuss material things, philosophy shows the relationship of symbols rather than the relationship of actual properties of the things which the symbols denote.

In other words, one answers the question, "What is the nature of a material thing?" by indicating, in general terms, what are the relations that must hold between any two of one's sense-contents for them to be elements of the same material thing.¹¹

For example, two sense-contents directly resemble one another when there is no difference of quality between them or only an infinitesimal difference. They resemble one another indirectly when they are linked by a series of direct resemblances. Also, two sense-contents are said to be continuous when they belong to successive members of a series of actual, or possible, sense-fields and there is no difference between them in respect to location in the sense-field. We speak of sense-field in order

¹¹ Ayer, L., T., and L., 65.

to keep the problem of perception on the subjective logical plane. We thereby avoid the difficulty of bridging the gap between logical symbols and material things. Symbols are symbols and will never equal actual things; they are at most representative.

These definitions of resemblance and continuity of sensation are useful in determining the unity of material beings. Two sense-contents are members of the same material being if they are related by direct or indirect resemblance and continuity. Of course, one sense-content cannot be member of two material beings. Sense-contents of a tactual or visible group will belong to the same material being if they are part of the same sense-experience. Unity of sensation will determine the unity of a material object. When our taste, smell, sound, and touch all happen to be directed toward the same object, the object is one, regardless of the fact that we are apprehending it by means of various sense faculties. A quality is not an objective part of a being, but a word which characterizes an object of sensation. In Ayer's words:

Our answer is that to say of a certain quality that it is the real quality of a given material thing is to say that it characterizes those elements of the thing which are the most conveniently measured of all the elements which possess qualities of the kind in question. Thus, when I look at a coin and assert that it is really round in shape, I am not asserting that the shape of the sense-content, which is the element of the coin that I am actually observing, is round, still less that the shape of all the visual, or tactual, elements of the coin is round; what I am asserting is that roundness of shape characterises those elements of the coin which are experiences from the point of view from which

measurements of shape are most conveniently carried out.¹²

How does one judge whether the definitions given are accurate? If they conform to usage and practicality, they are correct. Words and symbols can have any meaning we give them. Philosophy examines the meaning and use of these symbols. Philosophy also examines to see that the system of definitions is consistent. The validity of a language depends not only on convention among peoples but on intrinsic compatibility. To facilitate language analysis, many logical positivists employ the use of an artificial system of symbols, called symbolic logic, whose structure is known for the classification of the forms of the language. Ayer himself frequently employs symbolism in his writings, but we have not found it necessary to make use in this paper of such symbolism.

Though most of the material dealt with in this Chapter thus far has been taken from Language, Truth, and Logic, the same doctrine is found in Ayer's other writings. He is everywhere interested in language and logic primarily. His approach is always the same. He frequently calls philosophy the logic of science. Such an approach, he believes, simplifies greatly the problem of philosophy. Philosophers should all be of one opinion. He marvels that different schools of philosophy should even exist.

¹² Ibid., 68.

Since philosophical propositions are logical propositions, no one, on reflection, should dispute their validity. All the evidence needed to decide such philosophic questions can be found in language itself. On the factual plane, due to the inadequacy of evidence, disputes may arise. But such disputes are factual, and thus definitely not philosophical.

Ayer's language approach enables him to solve to his satisfaction many problems which have perplexed scholastics for ages. He avoids the problem of existence of universals by leaving the word existence indefinite. People say that there are such things as justice, goodness, beings, etc., therefore such things exist. But what do they mean by the word exist? That is the question. Obviously, they do not mean that such qualities can be discovered experientially in concrete singular form. Then, they are merely useful symbols employed to convey subjective thoughts or impressions. We find such words useful and use them. We do not worry about any so-called objective reality to which they conform. They have symbolic logical meaning for us and that is all that we mean when we say that they exist.

Ayer also sidesteps the problem of analyzing the relationship between a subject and its properties by referring to properties as predicates. It is according to the rules of logic to predicate adjectives of nouns. Therefore, to say that John is

fat means that we possess a sense-content which can be adequately symbolized by the words John and fat. They possess the characteristics to which correspond, by previous designation, the symbols John and fat. In making such predication we mean no more than that we have had such a sensation. We do not worry about the nature of the object of this sensation. We are strict phenomenologists in never going beyond our own sense-contents.

Ayer's language approach is also evident in the way he handles many other philosophical problems. He avoids the problem of singularity and individuality by referring to singular and individual signs. We have previously indicated a few of the logical rules by which the unity of a sense-object is determined. Frequently, he will simplify a problem by substituting the word indicator for a predicate. In this way he can concentrate on a subject alone and disregard the predicate. Such a substitution is called by all logical positivists translation from the material to the formal mode of speaking. For example, the sentence "Napoleon is a man" can be translated into "Napoleon is an indicator." Now the sentence no longer is used to describe an object of sensation, but retains logical significance only. The word indicator is vague enough to allow the subject a latitude of significance. We can study all the possibilities of meaning of the word Napoleon without having its meaning limited by the pred-

icate. It is simply a word. It can refer to the historical personage, the dog of comic strip fame, the name of a restaurant, or a coin. It could be an adjective and refer to an era, a legend, etc. Such translation certainly has its merits, if only to show the latitude of meaning a word may have and the relationship words may have. Whether it answers the problems of reality by denying them and sticking to the logical plane remains to be seen.

So far we have distinguished two types of meaning: the meaning words have in relationship to each other, and the meaning they have in relationship to reality. These two meanings are usually referred to as tautological and factual respectively. As has been mentioned, the exact factual meaning of words, being a matter of fact, must be left to the psychologist or sociologist. It is for them to study why people call a horse a horse, murder a sin, etc. Philosophy, being a logical science, is itself on the logical plane. Yet, being a universal science, it studies all words, be they completely tautological or properly factual. Therefore, as philosophers, we should first study tautology in general, and then later study factual meaning.

Strict tautology takes two forms: mathematics and logic. Both are a priori sciences which are self-sufficient and have no bearing on the factual world about us. They are mere

mental constructions formed by the mind to use as tools to describe the world; but in themselves they say nothing about the world. They are dead instruments, which have no more meaning than one gives them.

Because logic and mathematics have no more meaning than we give them, they are certain, absolute sciences. The truth of their propositions are a priori, independent of fact, and absolutely certain and necessary. This being the case, they cannot be factual statements, for all factual statements are at best highly probable. Mill had said that logic and mathematics were not necessary but merely hypothetical generalizations. But mathematics and logic do not come out of experience, and are not just general laws describing general aspects of reality. It is true that all knowledge begins with experience, and we do get our logical and mathematical symbols from experience and we most likely get hints of our a priori laws from the workings of nature about us, but the organization of these symbols into a consistent science is completely a priori.

Mathematics certainly is not intuitive and did not, as a science, originate in experience. Its propositions are true whether reality can be found to conform to its laws or not. For example, $2 \times 5 = 10$ is necessary regardless of experience. A triangle has 180° regardless of experience. As a matter of fact, the angles of no real triangle can be measured accurately enough

to verify this latter proposition, but it is still a true tenet of Euclidean geometry. Logical laws, like the laws of the excluded middle, are also true regardless of the verification principle. They are true because we make them so and prefer to deny their application to reality than deny their intrinsic necessity. To deny such necessity would be to contradict what we had just got through establishing by definition.

Another word for tautological propositions is analytic. Kant held an analytic proposition to be one in which the predicate belonged to the subject as something which was covertly contained in the subject. "All bodies are extended" is analytic because the predicate is part of the definition of the subject. But, $7 + 5 = 12$ is synthetic because addition takes place. Something new is added. Kant gives no criterion for judging the difference between analytic and synthetic propositions. Sometimes he uses a psychological criterion, and other times a logical criterion. But such criteria may be contradictory, as they are on different levels. Ayer defines analytic propositions to be those whose validity depends solely on the definitions and symbols contained in them. Analytic propositions say nothing about matters of fact; but they are not senseless, since they do show how symbols are used. They are not concerned with the workings of thought but with the formal relationships of classes of words. A syn-

thetic proposition will be one whose validity depends on facts of experience.

The Aristotelian laws of identity, contradiction, etc. are analytic because purely arbitrary and a priori. They are valid in their own right. In fact, they are valid whether incorporated into a system or not, whether they are deducible from other principles or not. Other logical laws may, by definition, be valid only within a system. For example, the symbols of symbolic logic are only logical and meaningful within the system of symbolic logic. There are various mathematical propositions which may be true within one system of mathematics but not true in another. For instance, the whole is greater than the part in finite but not in non-finite mathematics. Both systems are meaningful and certain intrinsically. The very fact that two mathematics are contraries shows that they cannot pertain to the same reality under the same aspect. These sciences are non-factual and tautological. Not only is experience not conducive to explaining the principles of mathematics, but it is often a positive hindrance. Thus, in the teaching of mathematics, the teacher must constantly warn the student not to rely on diagrams, intuitions, etc. to clarify mathematical notions. Diagrams will often be illusory and misleading.

Although a tautological system of sentences is analytic



and, as the name indicates, the predicates of its propositions are identified with their subjects, these propositions are not completely redundant. Nor can all of its propositions be reduced to one principle, say, the principle of identity. Tautological definitions can be unfolded and amplified until a beautiful harmonious tapestry of interweaving ideas and laws can be constructed. In building and weaving a tautological system, although all the laws in themselves are certain, errors can creep in. These errors, however, are not the fault of the system, but the fault of the one using the system who has unwittingly violated a law of the system in working with it. For example, $91 \times 79 = 1989$ requires calculation by multiplication, a legitimate operation of mathematical transformation. One can unwittingly violate the multiplication laws and arrive at an error. But this is not the fault of mathematics but of the mathematician.

Having discussed the validity of a priori propositions, we may proceed to factual propositions, and discover what criteria will validate them. In regard to them we do not ask whether they have meaning alone, which can be answered by analyzing their logical consistency, but whether they are true or false. Factual meaning means that the propositions are representative of a sense-content. Therefore, correct correlation is known as true, incorrect correlation is called false. The words true or false do not add any quality to the reality, but merely assert or

deny a proposition. The sentences "Queen Anne is dead," and "Queen Anne is dead is true" say one and the same thing. The word true just adds emphasis.

To determine the truth or falsehood of an empirical proposition is not as easy as it might first appear. Many hold that purely ostensible propositions are certain and other empirical propositions are hypotheses based on these. Ayer denies that there can be purely ostensible propositions. No sentence is purely demonstrative, i.e., merely registers sense-content; they all go beyond, they classify and say something about sense-experience. For example, "This is white" not only describes sense-contents which I think to be white but says my sensation is similar to other sense-contents which I also call white. But this implies knowledge of a general quality, whiteness, based on previous assertions of the same sensation. Every assertion, therefore, implies other assertions. Since every assertion is a complex of assertions, there is no such thing as a purely ostensive proposition. Ayer does not here deny sensation or our ability to describe it. Sensation is the basic fact; it is neither true nor false. But our description of a sensible fact will be true or false.

Because all empirical propositions are complexes and contain implied assertions, no one empirical proposition can be

absolutely true. In attempting to verify it, we would have to verify all the implied assertions contained in it. In verifying them we would make other assertions which would have to be verified in turn ad infinitum.¹³ Positivists are not sceptics, who deny all empirical propositions; nor do they attempt this infinite verification process. They verify a proposition by sufficient experimentation to make it highly probable, and rely on this practical certitude without bothering to seek absolute certitude. Such certitude is neither possible nor necessary.

Experience can never invalidate a priori systems. If the facts should disagree with a tautological law we do not have to deny the law but just to change the conditions required for the verification of the law or to deny that the conditions were present in the experiment. In mathematics, when one theory does not explain a particular phenomenon another theory is used. This does not falsify the first theory. Such theories are certain in their own logical plane, regardless of whether they are verifiable or not. Such theories, though, are constructed because they normally do enable us to explain reality. They are very useful in predicting and anticipating future events. "Hypotheses are rules which govern our expectation of future experience."¹⁴ For

¹³ Ayer treats this matter in Phil. Essays, 114-122.

¹⁴ Ayer, L. T. and L., 97.

example, the geometric proposition, the square of the hypotenuse of a right triangle equals the sum of the squares of the other two sides, is true independently of reality. But if we can find a right triangle in reality and measure two of its sides, we will by means of the proposition be able to predict the length of the third side. The mathematical tautology said nothing about reality, but if we can substitute factual symbols into the premises, as we do, the conclusion also becomes true in the realm of fact. We can not prove such a result, but we know it happens. The method works and has been tested by experience. We can use it with confidence.

Ayer limits the meaning of certitude in his latest works. He admits the common usage of the word certain, but claims that people really mean, at most, a practical certitude, a high degree of probability. They take it for granted that no one has absolute certitude and give the word certain a weaker meaning. A thing is called probable only when one has a special reason for doubting it, not just because of the natural probability that is associated with all empirical propositions.

But if my reason for saying that it is not certain is merely the general reason that all empirical beliefs are fallible, then it is not consonant with ordinary usage to say that it ^{is} only probable. It is correct to say that is certain.¹⁵

Thus far the basic tenets of Ayer's logical positivism. This philosophy, Ayer tells us, is the philosophy of the scientist. Science does not prove its conclusions absolutely; it does not speak of absolute laws or truths. It analyzes the past and by inductive methods forms theories and laws. By means of these laws and mathematical manipulations it makes deductions and predictions about the future. By its method it has achieved great success, and success is the measure of the worth of any method. The philosopher, Ayer tells us, will do well to imitate such a method and rule his whole life by it. Then he too will achieve success in his endeavors. Ayer's philosophic approach to life may well be summed up in the following.

So long as the general structure of my sense-data conforms to the expectations that I derive from the memory of my past experience, I remain convinced that I am not living in a dream; and the longer the series of successful predictions is extended, the smaller becomes the probability that I am mistaken....The most that we can do is to elaborate a technique for predicting the course of our sensory experience and to adhere to it so long as it is found to be reliable. And this is all that is essentially involved in our belief in the reality of the physical world.¹⁶

16 Ayer, Foundations, 274.

CHAPTER III

AYER'S EMOTIVE THEORY OF VALUE

In chapter II, we saw that, according to Ayer, all synthetic propositions are empirical and should be judged true or false according to the verification principle. This principle is true in regard to judgments of facts. No one will deny this. But what about judgments of value? They are certainly synthetic. Are they also empirical? It is the contention of Ayer that such value or ethical judgments are not really judgments or assertions at all but expressions of one's subjective attitude or emotional reaction to an objective fact. In this chapter we will show how Ayer arrived at this conclusion.

Ethical statements pertain to the factual order of things for they deal with stealing, murder, lying, etc., all factual occurrences. They are also synthetic because the predicates are not just reiteration or definitions of the subjects. All ethical propositions fall under one or other of four main categories.

We divide them into four main classes. There are, first of all, propositions which express definitions of ethical terms, or judgments about the legitimacy or possibility of certain definitions. Secondly, there are propositions describing the phenomena of moral experience, and their

causes. Thirdly, there are exhortations to moral virtue. And lastly, there are actual ethical judgments.¹

Ayer continues to tell us that only the first class comprises propositions which belong to the science of ethical philosophy, for it is the purpose of philosophy to define. The second class, which describes actual moral experiences and attitudes, falls under the science of psychology or sociology. Those sciences deal with actual beliefs and attitudes. Philosophy never decides factual problems, what is true or what is false. "The question for moral philosophy is not whether a certain action is right or wrong but what is implied by saying that it is right, or saying that it is wrong."² The third class, comprising exhortations to virtue, are not really propositions. They state nothing. They are ejaculations or commands urging us to a course of action. They tell us nothing about reality. Hence, they have no place within an ethical philosophy. They are purely subjective and arbitrary. The fourth class, real ethical judgments, perhaps belong in the law books of a nation, or listed among the precepts of a religion, but they certainly do not belong to ethical philosophy. As was explained in the last chapter, it is the purpose of philosophy to define, to analyze our use of lan-

1 Ayer, L. T. and L., 103.

2 Ayer, Phil. Essays, 235.

guage. It does not determine matters of fact. Therefore, ethical philosophy can only clarify the meaning of ethical terms used by people. It cannot tell us what is right and wrong, nor what people consider to be right and wrong. Sociologists investigate such matters of fact. "A strictly philosophical treatise on ethics should therefore make no ethical pronouncements. But it should by giving an analysis of ethical terms show what is the category to which all such pronouncements belong."³

Ayer now proceeds to the business of defining his terms. In defining anything he tries to find synonyms that will be more descriptive of the sense-contents dealt with. In technical language, he translates the definiendum into protocol elements and sentences which directly or indirectly describe sensible phenomena. He wants to align his ethical terms, like good, right, etc., with empirical data. If such terms are not reducible to descriptions of fact, they will then be literally senseless; propositions containing them will be factually meaningless. It is Ayer's contention that such terms are factually meaningless. He will first prove this fact and then go on to show that they are not, however, altogether meaningless but have an emotional significance.

In order to show that ethical terms and statements are

3 Ayer, L. T. and L., 103-104.

not empirical, it is necessary first to show that they are not descriptive. We here distinguish between strictly normative propositions and terms and descriptive propositions and terms. A descriptive sentence is one like, "The grass is green." The predicate here describes an objective quality of the subject, and such a proposition can be verified scientifically by means of sensible experimentation. A normative sentence is one like, "Murder is wrong." The predicate here gives a moral estimate of the subject. It does not describe any verifiable quality of the subject, but categorizes the subject ethically. It is this latter type proposition which is classed ethical.

The same sentence may sometimes have an ethical normative meaning or else a descriptive meaning. This occasionally leads to some confusion as to the proper meaning of a sentence. Let us express the problem in Ayer's own words:

There is a danger of confusing these two types of symbols, because they are commonly constituted by signs of the same sensible form. Thus a complex sign of the form "x is wrong" may constitute a sentence which expresses a moral judgment concerning a certain type of conduct, or it may constitute a sentence which states that a certain type of conduct is repugnant to the moral sense of a particular society. In the latter case, the symbol "wrong" is a descriptive ethical symbol, and the sentence in which it occurs expresses an ordinary sociological proposition; in the former case, the symbol "wrong" is a normative ethical symbol, and the sentence in which it occurs does not, we maintain, express an empirical proposition at all.⁴

4 Ayer, L. T. and L., 105-106.

Ayer goes on to tell us that he is here concerned with strictly normative sentences. But the question immediately arises whether purely normative sentences actually exist. Ayer did not treat of this problem at length but it was discussed by another member of the emotive theory of value school, C. L. Stevenson, with whom Ayer is in basic agreement. Stevenson presents the thesis that all normative propositions are also descriptive. Such propositions will have two meanings: an ethical or emotive meaning, which is called by him the First Pattern of meaning; and a descriptive meaning, which he calls the Second Pattern. In so far as the sentence is descriptive, it is factually significant. It is subject to empirical verification and can be classed true or false. In so far as it is emotive, it is none of these.

And in particular, it [this work] emphasizes the complex descriptive meaning that ethical judgments can have, in addition to their emotive meaning. Descriptive meaning is not eliminated even in the first pattern (though it could have been), and for the second it is recognized quite freely. Such a procedure avoids any dogmatism about "the" meaning of ethical judgments, and tempers the paradoxical contention that ethical judgments are "neither true nor false." This latter remark is wholly misleading. It is more accurate and illuminating to say that an ethical judgment can be true or false, but to point out that its descriptive truth may be insufficient to support its emotive repercussions.⁵

⁵ C. L. Stevenson, Ethics and Language, New Haven, 1953, 267.

Even single terms, like good, for Stevenson may in the same context convey both descriptive and ethical meaning. Just as when one says food is good he designates the appetibility of the food while also expressing his own desire for it, so when we say that honesty is good we may at times desire to say that honesty is something which makes for harmony and happiness in society and satisfies the general wish of mankind, or we may merely be evoking our own love of the virtue, our wish that others would also esteem this virtue highly. Both meanings will always be present in the same word, but one meaning may be heightened more than the other, depending on the situation. The descriptive element, for Stevenson, is never wholly absent.

For the moment, then, it will suffice to emphasize that the emotive meaning of good is not wholly independent, but only partly so. It may be dependent on any other sort of meaning; and because of the flexibility of language, it is always, in part, either dependent on descriptive meaning or quasi-dependent.⁶

Stevenson goes on to tell us that the moral or emotive implications of words and phrases can be recognized by the traditional moral attitudes they effect in the subjects evoking them. These attitudes are sense of guilt or innocence, shock or horror, admiration or awe, qualms of conscience, etc. All of these attitudes are emotive and in them lie the foundation of morality. He admits the fact that it is not always possible to clearly

⁶ Ibid., 88.

delineate where descriptive meaning leaves off and where ethical feeling begins. Words are vague and our use of them is vaguer. This vagueness cannot be entirely done away with. We can never get beyond the realm of probability. As Wittgenstein once said, to remove vagueness is to outline the penumbra of a shadow. The shadow always remains.

Ayer admits that many statements contain both an ethical and a descriptive meaning at the same time and that this fact has led many to believe that ethical or emotive statements are truly descriptive of reality. However, he does believe in contra-distinction to Stevenson that some few statements are completely emotive and non-descriptive:

Moreover, a great many ethical statements contain as a factual element, some description of the action, or the situation, to which the ethical term in question is being applied. But, although there may be a number of cases in which this ethical term is itself to be understood descriptively, I do not think that this is always so. I think that there are many statements in which an ethical term is used in a purely normative way, and it is to statements of this kind that the emotive theory of ethics is intended to apply.

Ayer wrote this statement in 1946. In 1954 he continued to maintain this belief that some statements are purely emotive. "It is for this reason that these ethical predicates are not factual; they do not describe any features of the situation to

which they are applied."⁸ "A valuation," he again writes, "is not a description of something very peculiar; it is not a description at all."⁹ Ayer does not go on to give specific examples illustrating what he would call a completely ethical statement. In general he hesitates to give examples, believing that meaning of sentences can only be determined in context and that to give isolated sentences apart from context would distort their true significance.

He does talk about the ethical element in descriptive sentences, however, showing his basic accord with Stevenson.

Bentham gives "right" a descriptive meaning, but in so far as it is descriptive it is not ethical. Such definitions verbally are statements of facts and not normative, but such words carry an emotive force which make them recommendations of actions and in this respect they are ethical. They are ethical not by definition which is descriptive, but by emotive force or connotation.¹⁰

Actually, for our purposes, it does not matter whether such absolutely ethical sentences exist apart from description or not. The important thing is whether ethical sentences or the ethical aspect of sentences is purely emotive in meaning or not. Both Ayer and Stevenson are in agreement on this point as they are on most points. Ayer occasionally makes references to the

8 Ayer, Phil. Essays, 235-236.

9 Ibid., 242.

10 Ibid., 244-245.

writings of Stevenson and he always professes his agreement with Stevenson. Of Ayer, Stevenson has nothing but praise: "In the present writer's opinion, Ayer has managed in his very brief compass [I. T. and L.], to speak with clarity and much discernment."¹¹

Now that we have distinguished between normative and descriptive statements, we can proceed to the analysis of normative statements themselves. First of all, such statements are non-empirical, and cannot be translated into statements of objective fact. Objectivism, which asserts that such statements assert objective truths, is false, for truth, goodness, etc. are non-sensible. Naturalism, however, a brand of subjectivism, also asserts that they can be empirically verified, and this theory is equally false. This school defines rightness of actions as an assertion of the feelings of approval which a certain person, or group of people, has towards these actions. Such feelings are certainly factual, but they do not, in themselves, determine rightness or any other moral quality. It is not self-contradictory to assert that some actions which are generally approved of are not right, or that some things which are not generally approved of are good. A man may at one time approve of doing good, at another time approve of what is generally considered

11 Stevenson, Ethics and Language, 265.

wrong. Naturalism, then, tells us nothing about moral attitudes other than that we have them. This is a fact we already know.

Having refuted objectivism and naturalism, Ayer concludes that ethical symbols are absolute terms, with no subjective or objective connotations. These symbols do not assert anything factual but are factual themselves. In using the term absolute Ayer does not here propound absolutism, a more particular ethical theory, which holds that statements of value are not only not controlled by observation but are governed by a mysterious intellectual intuition. Such statements, Ayer holds, would be non-empirical. What might be intuitively true to one person might be false to another. The theory of intuition is worthless as the test of the validity of a proposition. Propositions are always verified by correlation with empirical data.

In rejecting absolutism, Ayer seems to be faced with a dilemma. He agrees with the absolutist that ethical concepts are irreducible to observation concepts. He does not accept their theory of absolute ethical propositions governed by intuition because such propositions, though synthetic, are non-verifiable and hence non-significant. His answer to the problem is that ethical concepts are irreducible to observation concepts and unanalyzable precisely because they are not concepts. They are

pseudo-concepts.¹² They express emotion but assert nothing factual whatever. By saying, "You acted wrongly in stealing that money," I am not stating anything more than if I had said "You stole that money." In adding that this action is wrong I am not making any further statement about it. I am simply expressing my moral disapproval of it. The same emotion could have been conveyed with a look of horror or added exclamation points.

Since ethical propositions assert nothing factual, they cannot be adjudged true or false. One cannot be contradicted on moral grounds. I may feel that stealing is wrong. Another may feel differently. Our sentiments may differ but that we have them is fact and cannot be contradicted. Intuitionists, realizing that ethical concepts are unverifiable, were easily led to believe them absolute concepts. They spoke a half-truth. They are absolute, but they are not concepts. "I do in fact suspect that the experiences which some philosophers want to describe as intuitions or as quasi-sensory apprehensions of good are not significantly different from those I want to describe as feelings of approval."¹³

Whether ethical symbols occur in sentences which are purely expressive of ethical feeling, or in sentences which are also descriptive of some fact, the function of the ethical word

¹² Ayer first proposes this emotive theory of value in L., T., and L., 107-109.

¹³ Ayer, Phil. Essays, 239.

is purely emotive. Ayer is very clear on this point:

But in every case in which one would commonly be said to be making an ethical judgement, the function of the relevant ethical word is purely "emotive." It is used to express feeling about certain objects, but not to make any assertion about them.¹⁴

Ethical terms are used not only to express feeling, but also to arouse feeling, and cause action on the part of the hearer.

In saying that Brutus or Raskolnikov acted rightly, I am giving myself and others leave to imitate them should similar circumstances arise.... Similarly, in saying that they acted wrongly, I express a resolution not to imitate them, and endeavour also to discourage others.¹⁵

Ethical terms then are effectively hortatory. For example, the sentence "It is your duty to tell the truth" not only expresses one's feelings about truthfulness but also tells the listener to "tell the truth." The sentence "You ought to tell the truth" is also a command but it is a little less emphatic than the previous sentence. The sentence, "It is good to tell the truth," is an even milder form of the same command. Duty and ought differ only in degree. In like manner, all other ethical terms can be analysed and explained. They differ only in the different feelings they express and the different responses which they are calculated to provoke.

14 Ayer, L., T., and L., 108.

15 Ayer, Phil. Essays, 237-238.

In saying that ethical terms express feelings, Ayer is careful to state that they do not assert feelings. They assert nothing. They are no more empirical than a cry of pain or a word of command. They are not propositions and not meant in any way to be descriptive.

For talking about values is not a matter of describing what may or may not be there; the problem being whether it really is there. There is no such problem. The moral problem is: What am I to do? What attitude am I to take? And moral judgements are directives in this sense.

It is easy to confuse assertions and expressions of feeling because they are so often present in the same sentences. The sentence "I am bored," for example, can do both or either. In stating it I may at times wish to assert the fact that I feel bored, or I may wish simply to elicit a feeling of boredom. Subjectively one can discern the different purposes by noticing whether the object is to convey an idea to another person or merely to breathe a sigh of boredom to oneself as it were. It will be noticed here that the expression of feeling is always concomitant with the assertion of feeling but the opposite is not always true. This is important to grasp in the value theory. We can express feelings without asserting them, and this is precisely what we do when we employ value symbols. "For whereas

the subjectivist holds that ethical statements actually assert the existence of certain feelings, we hold that ethical statements are expressions and excitants of feeling which do not necessarily involve any assertions."¹⁷

It might here be argued that, if ethics were just a matter of personal feelings, why are people so heavily concerned about questions of value, about what is right and what is wrong? On this theory, one person might feel that honesty is a virtue, while another person feels it to be a vice, and neither need be wrong. However, we do know that if someone said that honesty was a vice, he would get an argument from many people, and justly so. This fact seems to contradict the emotive theory of value.

It is true that the theory permits no disputes over value. Value propositions are expressions of feelings, and no one can gainsay another his feelings. Still, Ayer does permit arguments of the kind mentioned in the previous paragraph. The explanation is that such arguments are disputes not over value but over facts. We do not try to show another person that he has a wrong ethical feeling toward a case, but that he has the facts of the case wrong and therefore misinterpreted it. We then try to enlighten him on these facts. We believe that once he understands the case he will probably feel toward the

matter just as we ourselves do. If the second person has been brought up as we have and been conditioned by the same moral education, he will, on being presented with the proper facts of the case, probably agree with us. If he still disagrees after the facts have been explained to him, it is logical to conclude that he has a distorted moral sense or is very stubborn. He employs a different set of values than we do. We believe our set of values is superior to his because it is socially acceptable. We look askance at his perverted standards of value. Still, we cannot prove that our set of values is superior. We can argue with those who disagree with us and try to show them that their outlook may get them into trouble, but we cannot prove that their moral code is inferior to ours. Morals is all a matter of taste and De gustibus non est disputandum. Ayer first proposed this doctrine in 1936, but he has continued to hold it to the present day.

At the same time, it must be admitted that if the other person persists in maintaining his contrary attitude, without however disputing any of the relevant facts, a point is reached at which the discussion can go no further. And in that case there is no sense in asking which of the conflicting views is true. For, since the expression of a value judgement is not a proposition, ¹⁸ the question of truth or falsehood does not here arise.

¹⁸ Ibid., 22.

But when one considers how these ethical statements are actually used, it may be found that they function so very differently from other types of statements that it is advisable to put them into a separate category altogether; either to say that they are not to be counted as statements at all, or, if this proves inconvenient, at least to say that they do not express propositions, and consequently that there are no ethical facts.¹⁹

Since there are no such things as ethical facts, it follows that there are no so-called absolute moral principles. Moral precepts are suggestions, commands if you wish, but not absolute truths. Nothing can be true or false unless it assert something factual. Since moral statements are unverifiable, they cannot be true or false. The denial of absolute moral truths follows not only directly from Ayer's moral theory, but from his denial of all absolute truths.

It follows that any attempt to make our use of ethical and aesthetic concepts the basis of a metaphysical theory concerning the existence of a world of values, as distinct from the world of facts, involves a false analysis of these concepts.²⁰

Ayer explicitly does away with metaphysics, and the belief in absolute moral truths depends on metaphysics for its validity. For Ayer, nothing is true unless empirically verifiable, and the truths of metaphysics are not verifiable. They are literally senseless. They have neither analytic nor factual

19 Ayer, Phil. Essays, 232-233.

20 Ayer, L., T., and L., 114.

meaning. They purport to be factual yet cannot be tested. The real distinction between substance and accident; the necessary connection between cause and effect—such metaphysical assertions cannot be established by any amount of observation and experimentation. Substance does not exist, it is only a way of speaking, nor does existence exist. The word is is a logical copula used to connect subject and predicate. Such words may have a logical meaning, and usually do. The metaphysician makes his mistake in trying to find real objects to correspond to such purely logical terms. A metaphysician is not even a misplaced poet. His theory is not even a clever allegory. He believes he describes reality and does not. A poet at least admits he is dealing with the realm of fancy and make-believe. Some metaphysical sayings, however, can have an emotive significance. They may be the result of genuine mystical feeling and have, at least for the subject uttering them, a moral or aesthetic value. Even then, though, it is still true that these metaphysical sayings are literally senseless.

Since those who hold that moral principles have an absolute value in the factual order, usually derive these principles by deduction from absolute metaphysical premises, their ethical principles lose their absoluteness with the fall of metaphysics. Scholasticism is such a philosophy that must

be rejected, both as regards its metaphysical premises and its ethical conclusions.

Just as moral principles have no absolute validity, so the existence of a God, the originator and guardian of such principles, cannot be admitted. Ayer first shows, according to his principles, that the existence of God can never be demonstrated conclusively. The conclusion of a deductive demonstration can only be certain if the premises are certain. However, only a priori statements are certain, as was shown in the last chapter. From a priori premises we cannot argue to a real conclusion.

Ayer goes beyond this and tells us that the existence of God can not even be shown to be probable. If his existence were probable, the statement of it would be an experiential hypothesis, and other experiential propositions could be deduced from it. But, in fact, we have no experience of God nor are we led to any new experiential facts by postulating such a being. Some say that a God must be postulated to explain the order in the universe. But such an hypothesis leads us to no new facts about this world. No God is needed on the experiential plane. Others say that God is not experiential but the cause, the creator, of the world of experience. Ayer's answer is that such a transcendental being is metaphysical, beyond experience,

and therefore an empty senseless term.

In asserting that the word God is senseless, Ayer is not professing atheism or even agnosticism. Neither of these theories hold that the statement God exists is meaningless, as Ayer does. They simply hold that it cannot be proved or that it is false. To Ayer, to say that God does not exist is equally as senseless as saying that God does exist. Thus he is neither a theist nor an atheist nor an agnostic. For him sentences about God are not propositions but meaningless.

Thus we offer the theist the same comfort as we gave to the moralist. His assertions cannot possibly be valid, but they cannot be invalid either. As he says nothing at all about the world, he cannot justly be accused of saying anything false, or anything for which he has insufficient grounds. It is only when the theist claims that in asserting the existence of a transcendent god he is expressing a genuine proposition that we are entitled to disagree with him.²¹

Included in the denial of theism is a denial of such phenomena as miracles. Things are judged true or false in so far as they are experiential. Also, the normal laws of nature are simply generalizations of natural cause and effect relationships which we have observed. If something happens which does not follow such laws, it does not mean that some higher power has intervened to counteract the laws of nature. What

²¹ Ibid., 116.

happens is factual and therefore natural. It must be explained naturally. Our empirical laws must be changed to accommodate and explain these new phenomena. Non-Euclidean geometry was invented to explain spatial phenomena discovered by Einstein and other modern scientists. These new phenomena were not unnatural, but merely newly discovered. They just required new laws to explain and describe them. Miracles can be explained just as easily.

Once we had abandoned this metaphysical conception of natural law in favour of one that is empirically significant, there is no reason why we should draw any distinction between the occurrence of a "miracle" and the occurrence of any other event that runs counter to some accepted hypothesis....For, even if they did occur their occurrence would prove, not that the operation of the relevant laws could be suspended by a "higher power", but simply that we were wrong in supposing them to be universal laws; and then we should be left with the task of trying to find some other laws to put in their place.²²

Furthermore, religion which is founded on the existence of miracles and a God must be rejected as literally insignificant. Existence of the soul, after-life, free will, religious experiences, and similar religious truths must be admitted to have no foundation in reality. No scientist has ever verified the existence of a soul. There being no soul, it is obvious that

22 Ayer, Foundations, 208-209.

there is no life after death. The body is all that is left of the individual and this corrupts with death. My actions are no more determined by a free will than the actions of any animal are. Although there is no real necessity in the world, human actions are just as predictable in theory as any other natural occurrences. They are not determined by a free choice of a spiritual will, a non-verifiable faculty. On the other hand, by studying an individual's childhood, environment, and training, it is possible to predict the way in which he will act in the future. It is admitted that such predictions are more difficult with humans than with other natural phenomena. This is due to the variety and number of influences which determine human actions. Even so, it is theoretically feasible to predict what an individual man will do in a given situation. How men as a group will react to a situation is easier to predict, and sociology can provide us with rather accurate statistics on such reactions.

The reason most people invent religious and moral concepts is to resolve the mysteries and uncertainties prevalent in life. But with the advances of science, more and more of nature's mysteries are unfolded before us, and the need of religion is diminished in direct proportion as science advances.

The very explanations most men give for their religious beliefs tend to confirm Ayer's stand that religious truths are unverifiable. They admit that God transcends the human intellect; that it requires an act of supernatural faith to believe in him; that mysteries surround him. They refer to mystical experiences and revelations as proof of religious truths. Such experiences are emotional reactions at best, and no empirical facts can be forwarded to confirm them. From a psychological viewpoint religion might have a beneficial effect on people, act as a sedative to soothe their cares and fears, but factually it is valueless. "The point which we wish to establish is that there cannot be any transcendent truths of religion. For the sentences which the theist uses to express such "truths" are not literally significant."²³

In discrediting religion Ayer does not intend to discredit morality. In affirming that moral terms are emotive in meaning he does not thereby look on virtue as being unimportant. Nor does he believe that we should be indifferent to the code of ethics people choose to live by. As a philosopher he asserts that ethical concepts are emotive; as a philosopher he must be neutral as regards actual conduct and particular laws

23 Ayer, L., T., and L., 117-118.

of morality.

All moral theories, intuitionist, naturalistic, objectivist, emotive, and the rest, in so far as they are philosophical theories, are neutral as regards actual conduct. To speak technically, they belong to the field of meta-ethics, not ethics proper.

Ayer admits that he, like any other individual, has his own set of moral values by which he rules his life. As a person he feels that certain things are right and other things are wrong. And he believes that his set of values is better than any other set of values, though he admits that he cannot prove it. However, he does not have to defend his attitude. It is a matter of opinion, of personal feeling.

Finally, I am not saying that anything that anybody thinks right is right; that putting people into concentration camps is preferable to allowing them free speech if somebody happens to think so, and that the contrary is also preferable if somebody thinks that it is....I do not adhere to every standpoint whatsoever. I adhere to some, and not to others, like everybody else who has any moral views at all.²⁵

The ethical code Ayer personally believes in is Utilitarianism.²⁶ He is a follower of Bentham and Mill. He holds with them that man's happiness consists in doing those things that will produce the greatest good for the greatest number. Ayer believes that people feel that certain actions

24 Ayer, Phil. Essays, 246.

25 Ibid., 247.

26 On Utilitarianism confer Phil. Essays, 250-270.

are morally right, because such actions bring them the greatest happiness and satisfaction. He admits that he cannot prove that man always identifies moral rectitude with the ability to produce happiness, but it is so universally true that he considers it sufficiently verifiable to be able to be formulated into a scientific law of conduct. It is also a law of nature that man's good is wrapped up in the social good, for man is a social creature. It is a well known fact that men generally find their happiness in seeing those about them happy and in making them happy. "It is better to give than to receive." Since this is true, Ayer believes people ought to be educated according to this principle of Utility, and lawmakers should be guided by it in legislating and passing judgment on citizens. If all people would understand that their happiness consists in seeking the greatest good for the greatest number, they would then all have the same moral attitudes. They would use the same norms in judging right from wrong.

Our proposition is, in short, that the members of a given community will be more likely to obtain what they want on the whole, if they habitually behave towards one another in certain ways rather than in certain other ways, if they are, for example, habitually kind rather than cruel. And it seems to me that this is a type of proposition that can be practically verified.²⁷

A universal attitude like this on the part of men would produce unheard-of harmony in the world. Admittedly, differences of opinion would arise as to what is for the good of people in particular and in common, but such questions would be factual and solvable. Agreement would be had as regards the general norm of morality.

This chapter, I believe, can be summed up in one sentence. For Ayer, all ethical concepts are purely emotive; concepts about God and religion are factually meaningless; and Utilitarianism is the best guide in determining one's moral attitudes.

Ayer gathered many of his ethical doctrines from the teaching of Bertrand Russell. It might be well to end this chapter with an expression of Russell's doctrine in his own words. It pretty much synthesizes Ayer's own doctrine.

Questions as to 'values'—that is to say, as to what is good or bad on its own account, independently of its effects—lie outside the domain of science, as the defenders of religion emphatically assert. I think that in this they are right, but I draw the further conclusion, which they do not draw, that questions as to 'value' lie wholly outside the domain of knowledge. Ethics is an attempt to bring the collective desires of a group to bear upon individuals; or conversely, it is an attempt by an individual to cause his desires to become those of his group....When a man says, 'This is good in

itself, '...he means...'Would that everybody desired this.'...Such a statement makes no assertion, but expresses a wish; since it affirms nothing, it is logically impossible that there should be evidence for or against it, or for it to possess either truth or falsehood.²⁸

²⁸ Bertrand Russell, Religion and Science, London, 1936, 230-237.

CHAPTER IV

CRITICISM OF AYER'S DOCTRINE

A criticism of Ayer's value theory must begin with a criticism of his Logical Positivism, for his value theory is based on this philosophy, and must stand or fall with it. After treating with his positivism as such, we will proceed to an analysis of particular errors latent or perhaps blatant in his value theory. In refuting these two theories, we will indirectly be advocating Thomistic metaphysics and ethics. To make our position clear, however, we will conclude this paper with a brief declaration of our positive position.

Logical Positivism has enjoyed great popularity the last twenty years, especially in America. There is much in the movement which makes it attractive—its purpose, the results it achieves and the means it uses to achieve these results. It aims at the unification of all knowledge, a noble end. It recognizes the progress achieved by scientific means, and in emulation of the scientist it strives to stay close to experience in its study. It correctly interprets the scientific method as consisting in the formation of theories and verification of these theories by experimentation. It wisely under-

takes to make clear the meaning of the words it uses by language analysis. It has contributed immensely to this language analysis by the development of symbolic logic, an extremely useful tool. In regard to its value theory it has correctly pointed out the emotive and persuasive elements in our moral judgments. It is so easy at times to neglect the emotional element influencing our ethical ideas. It is wondered how many who today approve of euthanasia are moved in this judgment more by their reason than by their feelings. Still, Logical Positivism seems to be waning in popularity at the present. As a philosophy it has ceased to be convincing. Its doctrine contains too many errors and inconsistencies. Let us now go over these errors.

I. PHILOSOPHY IS MORE THAN ANALYSIS OF LANGUAGE.

Logical Positivism restricts its philosophic endeavors to the analysis of language. To this narrow approach practically all positivistic doctrines can be traced. It begins with language and ends with it. Language and sensation are the only two things admitted by positivism. Sensations are handled empirically by the sciences, and philosophy as the universal science studies language, the tool of all sciences. This division of labor presupposes a definite break between language and sensible reality. Language has no foundation in reality and philosophy has no real object, just language. Such an approach

prejudices the issue. The traditional object of philosophy has always been being. Logical Positivism avoids the problem of being and cognition by denying being and restricting its study to language. It claims to be a universal science, yet will not study the universe of reality.

The point of philosophical statements is peculiar. It is the illumination of the ultimate structure of facts, i.e., the relations between different categories of being. What logical positivists and other 'linguistic philosophers' often forget is the point of their investigations.

II. EMPIRICISM AND NOMINALISM UNFOUNDED.

Ayer considers language as a mere collection of symbols used to designate given sense-data. Language does not convey ideas, nor represent intelligible things. Universal ideas are meaningless to him. In short, Ayer is a nominalist. His nominalistic approach to language is based on his empiricism. Because he does not prove it, but presumes it, his empiricism itself is unfounded. Even so, in analyzing language, Ayer refutes his own nominalistic approach. He employs the very universal ideas he scorns.

One who gives a reasoned explanation of anything, even of his nominalism, has already transcended nominalism. To give a reasoned explanation is to deal with an essential order that is realized in reality, it is to testify to

1 Campbell Crockett, "The Short and Puzzling Life of Logical Positivism," The Modern Schoolman, XXXI, January, 1954, 92.

necessity in nature that goes beyond individual sense data altogether and regulates them.² It is to deal with essence that is manifest to thought.

III. PRINCIPLE OF VERIFICATION IS SELF-CONTRADICTORY.

Because Ayer limits reality to sense-data, he logically concludes that nothing is real unless verifiable. Paradoxically, however, this logical conclusion involves an illogical contradiction. As previously stated, Ayer ruled all necessity out of the factual order. Nothing then is factually true unless verifiable. Is this principle of verifiability factual or not? In determining what is real and what is not, it seems to be dealing with the real order. It must therefore be factual and also subject to the principle of verification.

According to the principle of verification, all significant statements must be either a priori truths or empirically verifiable. Now this principle dealing as it does with more than a priori truths, must itself be an empirical proposition and so empirically verifiable.³

But is it verifiable? Certainly not, as Ayer understands verification, i.e., empirical sensible testability. If it is not verifiable, it is not factual. This is more in keeping with Ayer's claim that all necessary principles are confined to the logical plane. But it leaves Ayer with the unsatisfying conclusion that

² Ephrem MacCarthy, O.P., "The Logical Empiricism of A. J. Ayer," Philosophical Studies, III, June, 1953, 41.

³ MacCarthy, "Log. Emp. of Ayer," Phil. Stud., 1953, 59-60.

he has no means whatever of discerning what is factual and what is not, what is true and what is false. This is the unhappy conclusion he should draw when he denies factual necessity in favor of empiricism.

IV. NECESSARY CAUSALITY NOT PURELY TAUTOLOGICAL BUT FACTUAL.

Logical Empiricism has also led Ayer to restrict all necessity to the logical plane. Necessity is not sense; therefore, it is not real, he concluded. Not understanding how meaning can exist on the logical plane in an essentially different way than it does on the factual plane, we might wonder what is logical necessity. But granting it, we are forced by the facts to disagree with Ayer and predicate necessity of the factual order also. Ayer throws a barrier between the logical and factual order and allows no carryover. But as regards necessity at least he must. The principle of contradiction, the principle of causality, etc., are derived from reality, are descriptive of reality, and pertain to reality. People live and abide by these laws of being. To deny them would lead to scepticism. Ayer admits that we predict future events on past occurrences. It is also a fact of nature that causal relationships do repeat themselves. As a factual occurrence they demand an intrinsic reason. Ayer as a positivist should admit such facts, and as a philosopher should seek to explain them.

Even though he restricts himself to language analysis, he must admit that cause and effect are English words which have factual meaning. Though words have no more meaning than people give them, people do attach a necessary connection between cause and effect. They predicate these words of reality. The logical conclusion is that they mean what they say: that there is an objective cause-effect relationship. Such a relationship, whether true or false, cannot be ruled out by language analysis.

Ayer makes use of necessary laws of reduction to clarify sentences and reduce them to protocol sentences, sentences immediately descriptive of reality. He seeks a certain path to reality by means of certain laws. Why does he not go all the way and attribute this necessity not to the protocol sentences alone, but to the things they stand for, reality? Causality, and we do not mean mere temporal sequence, is verifiable. Ayer should give an explanation for it. Brand Blanshard, though an idealist, sums up the illogicality of Ayer's stand on necessity very well.

We find it assumed in every judgement that the laws of logic are valid of the world with which thought is concerned, a world independent of present assertion. And this assumption is compulsory, since without it thought cannot take a step. Is it also true? That we cannot prove. But the contrary suggestion is meaningless. And thus the alternative actually before us is to accept these laws as independently valid or to cease thinking altogether.⁴

⁴ Brand Blanshard, Nature of Thought, II, London, 1939, 423.

V. WORDS ARE NOT MERE SYMBOLS BUT INTELLIGIBLE.

Words have an intelligible meaning which cannot be reduced to mere sensation.

In any case, a language which is to be adequate to human experience must include, in addition to logico-mathematical and strictly scientific concepts, many predicates such as courageous, temperate, beautiful, ugly, comic, and tragic which, while they are no doubt in large measure dependent upon sense experience, can by no means be altogether reduced to such experience.⁵

The eye senses objects but the mind looks to their intelligible essences by means of thought. When I say "Scott is the author of Waverly," to use a favorite example of Ayer, I am referring to a man, not to a bundle of sensations or sense data. Scott is a person regardless of particular sensations in time, place, shape, and form. Again, the real meaning in back of words is evident in our use of common nouns. Thing, being, life, etc. have definite meanings for us. Their meaning is on the factual plane, not on the tautological. They cannot be empirically verified, still they have meaning. Factual meaning then must transcend the sense level.

For instance, the class name 'man' is obviously supra-empirical, in that it is predicable of all possible men. Hence it has a unity and transcendence that sense data cannot account for. There must be a principle of its unity and transcendence that is real and existent.⁶

⁵ Thomas E. Hill, Contemporary Ethical Theories, New York, 1950, 28.

⁶ Ephrem Mac Carthy, O. P., "The Logical Empiricism of A. J. Ayer," Philosophical Studies, III, June, 1953, 43.

It is true, Ayer does allow some meaning on the tautological level. However, he insists that such meaning is distinct from anything factual. We wonder just what meaning tautologies have. Ayer says the meaning of tautologies is independent of objects and consists in consistency according to some logical or mathematical system. Factual meaning, though, is determined by real objects. Now just what is meaning for Ayer? He seems to have two essentially different concepts of it. Meaning, however, should have one common definition.

VI. OBJECT OF THOUGHT IS INTELLIGIBLE AS WELL AS SENSIBLE.

Meaning is derived from being. Ens est intelligibile. Man, while sensing objects, also abstracts universal concepts of them and in the reflection before judgment knows being and the principles of being. He then proceeds to judge all else in the light of being. Intellectual knowledge begins with being and derives meaning from being. Meaning then is intelligibility.

VII. SUBJECT OF THOUGHT IS INTELLIGIBLE AND EXISTENT.

Ayer has avoided the two-fold aspect of meaning and eliminated intelligibility by restricting himself to language analysis. This analysis he accomplishes by translating from the material to the formal mode of speech, whereby he classifies words according to the objects they designate. But beyond the meaning words have in themselves and in relation to objects, they

also have meaning for the person thinking. In eliminating intelligibility, Ayer also eliminates the person thinking. "Thus we may take Mr. Ayer's absolutist conception of language both as an unfounded assumption and as the starting point of his philosophy."⁷ He admits no reality beyond sense data and language; thus he does not admit a subject of cognition. Cognition, however, is a two-fold operation. It looks backward to the subject thinking as well as forward to the object thought. Ayer ignores this duality.

Ayer should logically admit a distinct subject of thought when he admits language and sense-data. For there must be some unifying principle which apprehends these things. Ayer admits that meaning is the correlation of symbols with symbols or symbols with sensible objects. Someone distinct from these symbols must be doing this correlating.

Ayer talks of unities of sense-data but admits no unifying subject....Ayer separates language and sense-data, and yet says we are aware of both. What is aware of both must be a subject.

For language alone, a subject is necessary. Ayer admits necessity, organization, and meaning in language. Mere symbols of themselves do not have such qualities. They must be

⁷ Ephrem MacCarthy, O. P., "The Logical Empiricism of A. J. Ayer," Philosophical Studies, II, June, 1952, 29-30.

⁸ Ibid., 26-27.

given to the symbols by a thinking subject. Only a rational mind can organize a meaningful system of necessary laws like mathematics or logic.

Thus sense-data alone can explain neither the unity nor the necessity of language, yet this unity and necessity, being real, must have a real explanation. The only adequate explanation is that language in its origins and in its use is ontologically dependent on an intellectual subject.

The very duration of sense impression, memory, awareness of the Ego, the necessity for accidents to inhere in a substance are all further proofs of the existence of a subject underlying thought. Some positivists believe by allowing introspection as sensible data they can admit the Ego. This Ego, however, is distinct from sensation. Such a reality is inconsistent with the other positivistic doctrines, absolutism and phenomenalism.

Language then is not a mere empty set of symbols with designative value only. It has ontological value, both in regard to the subject thinking and the object thought. Beyond sense-data, there exists the world of essences. Reality and intelligibility are one. Ayer's absolutism and constructionism which deny supra-empirical essences are, therefore, unfounded. They are false theories of reality. Logical Positivism is thus unable

9 MacCarthy, "Log. Emp. of Ayer," Phil. Stud., 1953,

to handle the problems of reality.

A very important conclusion follows, namely, that reality or sensible being is intrinsically intelligible. Thus the whole basis of logical empiricism disappears. Sensible objects are radically intelligible, and thus the duality that logical empiricism supposes between the intelligible and the existential disappears. Moreover, once sensible reality is radically intelligible, metaphysics is possible. We regard the refutation of absolutism of language and the refutation of constructionism, together with the consequent rejection of extrinsic class concepts and also Russell's theory of definite descriptions, as a complete refutation of the supposed logical basis of logical empiricism.¹⁰

In refuting Logical Positivism we have destroyed the foundation on which Ayer builds his emotive theory of value. Once we have put intelligibility, causality, and necessity back into the world and affirmed the existence of an intelligent Ego or subject, an emotive interpretation of value becomes meaningless and nonsensical.

VIII. ETHICAL PROBLEM FALSELY ENUNCIATED.

Ayer first laid down the ethical problem as being whether or not ethical terms could be defined empirically. We have already shown that there is more to reality than language and sensation. Ayer, therefore, has no right to assume that morality can be explained empirically. It may have an intelligible explanation. For the factual order is broader than phenomenalism holds it to be. It has an intelligible aspect. It con-

tains essences which are bound together and directed by necessary causes and relationships. Morality may be derived from these essences.

We agree with Ayer that intuitionism does not give an adequate picture of morality. We are not born with a code of ethics. Otherwise we would not be having such a difficulty determining the nature and content of this code. No, morality is not a priori but factual. It remains to be seen, however, whether morality is just sensible feeling or a reasoned attitude. The very fact that insane people are not held morally culpable for their actions immediately inclines one to the latter opinion.

IX. VALUE STATEMENTS ARE ASSERTIONS.

Ayer, for want of another explanation, having ruled out intuitionism and objectivism, concludes that value concepts are expressions of feelings. They assert nothing factual but are suasive emotive expressions. They have no more validity than a sigh or a groan and are neither true nor false. Now such an interpretation is not even empirical. Other ejaculations of the same form are assertions. Why do moral sentences take the form of assertions rather than the usual form used to express an emotion? When my tooth hurts, I say, "My toothache is painful." This is an assertion. When I say "cruelty is wrong," I am saying something just as definite. If I wanted to groan I would groan,

but I declare my moral attitudes as assertions. A correct analysis of language forces Ayer's position. Moral sentences are definitely assertions, not mere ejaculations.

X. VALUE STATEMENTS ARE NOT PRIMARILY EMOTIONAL.

Beyond this, ethical sentences do not assert just an emotion felt. No dictionary would ever define bad or good as certain feelings. A toothache may be painful, but cruelty is wrong. These predicates are entirely different. Painful is emotive; wrong is not. Rather it is simply moral, designating lack of conformity to the moral law. Ayer, on an empirical basis, cannot verify such a factual predicate which is not descriptive sensibly. Since the factual order is also intelligible, as shown, we must conclude that moral terms are intelligible. They are factual but not sensible. Therefore they are intelligible. Intelligibility is the only factual alternative to sensibility.

Morality is not just a matter of likes and dislikes as Ayer would like us to believe. To say, "Virtue is good," is not to express nor even to assert a liking of virtue. We may not like being good at all but we know it is the right thing to do.

The opposition between desire and duty, 'this is what I want to do' and 'this is what I ought to do' is suf-

ficiently familiar and sufficiently marked to make it reasonably certain that the emotion of approval which an ethical judgment expresses ¹¹ is not equivalent to a liking or a wishing or a desiring.

Moral expressions are more attitudes than feelings. But attitudes are mental things which suppose a thinking subject, a will, a reason. This interpretation is more in keeping with common sense. Ayer, who interprets language according to what people mean by it, himself says that the philosopher has no right to despise the beliefs of common sense. It is the general belief of mankind that moral utterances are mental attitudes, based on reason and will. It is admitted that intellectual emotions do arise from our moral beliefs, but such emotions do not deny these beliefs but rather flow from them. Positivists have long been confusing cognition and emotion, and disagree on the meaning of experience. "Does the term experience (to speak in the mode) serve a cognitive or an emotive function for the positivists?"¹² Mach speaks of elements, Carnap of the stream of experience, Neurath of physical situations, von Mises and Ayer of protocol sentences and sense-data. They never distinguish adequately between cognition and emotion.

¹¹ C. E. Joad, A Critique of Logical Positivism, Chicago, 1950, 126.

¹² Crockett, "Short and Puzzling Life of Log. Pos.," Mod. Schol., 89.

XI. VALUE STATEMENTS HAVE INTELLIGIBLE AND OBJECTIVE MEANING.

We must make a distinction for them. Intellectual emotion does not stand in opposition to cognition but flows from it. This is especially true in regard to moral beliefs. The only adequate explanation for having such likings or feelings lies in reasoned beliefs. We will go on presently to substantiate these beliefs.

Ayer interprets ethical disputes as disputes over facts, not over value as such. He also tells us that most people base their ethical feelings on the Utilitarian norm that moral goodness consists in seeking the greatest happiness for the greatest number. Now it is agreed that most ethical disputes are over facts and not over ethical norms as such. Most people agree on what is right and what is wrong in general. And most people believe that virtue entails seeking the social as well as the personal good. But all this is a description of the facts, not an explanation of them. The more significant moral disputes are precisely over the norms. Why do certain things make us morally happy, why are they ethically good? Honesty, charity, obedience to parents, etc. are considered by all men to be good. Why? That is the question philosophy should answer. People consider virtue as the highest good and believe it is to be practiced regardless of the consequences. Death is to be preferred to a violation of the moral code. Utilitarianism cannot give a reason.

for this fact. Moral good is something above and beyond mere sensible good, physical pleasure. A supra-empirical explanation is required. Moral good cannot be verified scientifically, its results cannot be measured with instruments. Its nature is not sensible. It must be intelligible and rational.

For while moral judgments cannot be verified, like the predictions of physics, they can be substantiated, and it is extremely important that they should be. And while the method of their substantiation is not 'scientific,' it is and ought to be rational, in a sense in which what is reasonably grounded is distinguished from that which is biased, arbitrary and unsound. And while, again, the conclusions thus reached are not 'objective' as physically measurable, they are publicly justifiable within a community whose common concerns they bring to reasonable expression and adjudication, and it is essential to their validity that they should be so. Thus understood, they are not nonsense, and neither are they merely verbal manipulations of uncriticizable biases.¹³

Such moral experience, for example, involves at least the implicit claim that its judgments intend to attribute some intelligible characteristic or relation to the objects or actions which they judge; but the pure Logical Positivists, by making all moral judgments emotive, deny this and affirm that when we seem to be judging anything morally we are really attributing nothing whatever, not even a relation to an emotion, to it, but that we are merely 'emoting.'¹⁴

Ayer's basic mistake, then, is his denial of intelligibility to ethical terms and statements. As regards language analysis in general he denied intelligible meaning to concepts

13 Arthur E. Murphy, The Uses of Reason, N. Y., 1943, 154.

14 Hill, Contemporary Ethical Theories, 26.

and to the subject and objects of these concepts. He has applied this false analysis to ethical concepts as well and told men that they do not really mean what they think they mean when they use the language of morality. His emotive theory is for him an escape from reality.

What then is the explanation for the origin and nature of ethical concepts? The explanation lies in the order of intelligibility. Looking at the world about us, we apprehend ideas of things and know their essences. In the act of thinking about these essences, we know the principles of contradiction, causality, and finality, all factual laws. We know a thing cannot be and not be at the same time; whatever changes, moves, or comes into existence must have an efficient cause; whatever acts must act for a purpose, either directly or indirectly. In understanding being, we know it is what it is and that it has a cause and an end or purpose. Looking closer at the universe about us and the wonderful order in it, we reason to the fact that it is a contingent being and was created by someone other than itself and that it is directed toward this one as toward its last end. This someone is known to all men as God.

God is universally held by mankind to be the creator of the world. The world was made by Him and for Him. He is the final cause of the world, the end for which all creatures were

made and toward Whom they tend. He is the beginning and the end, the Alpha and the Omega. Man, however, being an intelligent creature has a will, a free will whereby he can do what he wants to do. Since the fall of Adam in Eden—an historical fact—man's will was weakened and sin entered the world. Man, though directed toward God, by a free act of his will can move away from God through sin or toward God through virtue.

The moral order is nothing else then but the path man should follow in order to attain God, his last end. It is a law founded on nature and written in the hearts of all men who have reached the age of reason. It merely tells us to love God, i.e., direct our faculties of mind and will toward Him; and to love man who is made to the image and likeness of God. All other moral or ethical norms are merely ramifications of these two precepts. Once the positivist, Ayer included, realizes his mistake and recognizes the existence of intelligible essences and final and efficient causality in the real order, he will easily proceed to the knowledge of God, man's end. He will recognize the absolute moral order which, if followed, will lead him to God and to heaven.

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APPROVAL SHEET

The thesis submitted by Mr. John D. O'Neill, S.J., has been read and approved by three members of the Department of Philosophy.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

Jan. 6, 1957
Date

Paul V. Kennedy, S.J.
Signature of Adviser